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AUTHOR Herndl, Carl; Taylor, Vicki
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ABSTRACT

Teachers of advanced technical and professional writing need to provide credible ways in which their students can extend the cultural critique the teachers try to engage them in into the world outside the classroom. The nature of resistance in nonacademic discourse can be explored to help both the teachers and students think through the imposing tyranny of the "real" professional discourse. The concept of resistance fills the gap between the constraining power of ideology and institutions, and the possibilities for agency and social action. Using Anthony Giddens' theory of "structuration" as a basis to understand resistance in complex social structures, a study was conducted at the White Sands Missile Range, a test facility for missiles, electronic warfare devices, and other operations. The study asked: whether professional nonacademic writers recognize the ideological issues that organize their discourse; whether they recognize that the "reality" with which they deal is institutionally constructed and interested; whether they recognize that they operate from a subject position constructed by institutional power; whether these professionals try to change the discursive and social relations within which they work; and finally, to what end do they push for change--that is, to what social and political values are they committed? A biologist in the environmental division was chosen for a case study since it was suspected that the professional interests and ideology of a civilian biologist would conflict with those of the military command of the facility. All her professional writing was closely examined. Results indicated that: (1) ideological issues of quantification versus qualification appeared regularly; (2) the institutional realities are not accepted as natural, but ideologically constructed; and (3) the biologist understood the tensions inherent in her position. (RS)

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Carl Herndl and Vicki Taylor
New Mexico State University

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In the last two papers we heard about the insights that cultural studies provides us in thinking about students in the open university and about work in literacy. Our project is in some ways more problematic and farther away from the normal terrain of cultural studies. We are interested in the possibilities of bringing the questions of cultural critique into classes in advanced technical and professional writing. Our discussion today presents the working hypotheses and preliminary results which help us generate ways of thinking rather than firm conclusions.

Vicki and I began this study because professional discussions of liberatory pedagogy and the issue of resistance which we take to lie at the heart of it, are too circumscribed It seems to us that while teachers and theorists like those of us in this room are working to change our pedagogical practice and to open the university to nontraditional students, we need to look beyond our classrooms. Discussions of resistance always occur within attempts to theorize the politics of schooling. Work by Giroux, Schor, Bizzell, and others define resistance within the problematic of the liberatory classroom in which teachers and students attempt to reveal the relations of power and authority that construct education and students' subjectivity. Much of the work in such classes focuses on helping students understand why some forms of knowledge are excluded while others pass as privileged cultural capitol. But as much as the university is a modernist institution that

reproduces existing social relations--and I think it clearly is--our classrooms are a place in which authority and discourse can be opened to critique much more easily than elsewhere. We cannot deny our privileged racial, class and gender positions, or the institutionally constructed power we have as teachers, but despite all this many teachers manage to open these very issues up for discussion in their classes and engage students in a dialogue about our shared lives within the university. But this self-reflexive critique does not appear very frequently in the cultural practices outside university classrooms.

Because we share our students sense that liberatory classrooms are unusual, we want to address their objection that the kinds of activities involved in cultural critique begin and end at the door to the English classroom. Like many of our colleagues, we both teach advanced technical and professional writing courses. We are caught between our commitment to cultural analysis and critique, and the expectations that many of our students bring to the class. Our students come to these classes after fourteen years of schooling and engaged in technical and professional fields both of which construct them within the very ideologies we are interested in critiquing. Many of our students perceive the class's concern for questions of power, discourse, and ideology as a strictly academic exercises. For those students who do come to value the insight of ideological critique and to feel the need for social change, their sense that critique occurs only in selected classes and that real change is impossible is frustrating. As Sue Wells has argued, the rhetoric of technical and professional discourse is designed for what Habermas calls "rational purposive action"; it is an instrumental discourse aimed at efficiently resolving organizational

problems, and it seems particularly opposed to cultural critique and change. As a profession, we need to provide credible ways in which our students can extend the critique we try to engage them in into the world outside our classrooms. We are exploring the nature of resistance in nonacademic discourse to help both ourselves and our students think through the imposing tyranny of the "real" professional discourse, our students' sense, that is, that professional discourse is simply the way things are and that they must conform to reigning expectations.

Unfortunately, no one has explored the issue of resistance and critique in professional discourse. There are numerous analyses of the ideology of professional practices, science, medicine, law, engineering etc. But we have yet to begin looking at how or if people can construct cultural agency and engage in ideological resistance in the discourse of everyday professional practice. This gap in the research on nonacademic discourse is due largely to the research methods and the tradition of cultural pluralism we have inherited from anthropology. Research in professional writing tends to describe the dominant discourse of the research site and spends little time discussing possibilities of dissent, critique and resistance--the very issues that lie at the heart of liberatory teaching. Despite the recent efforts of colleagues like Cindy Selfe and Marilyn Cooper, Carolyn Miller, and Thomas Miller to introduce critique and the notion of praxis into technical and professional writing, we have not yet begun the field research necessary to help us understand how this might work and what it would look like.

In a few minutes Vicki will describe our research and some of our preliminary findings, but first I would like to sketch the working

definition of resistance and the kinds of research questions to which that definition has led us.

The concept of resistance is most powerfully associate with Marxist work in education by critics like Althusser, and Bourdieu and Passeron which understands schooling as a site for reproducing the forms of knowledge and subjectivity determined by a culture's dominant ideology. Most of the early work in this tradition focused on the issue of class and social inequity in schooling. Thus, a book like Paul Willis' Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs, describes how schooling leads working class students to drop out and take on the same working class jobs their parents had. Theorists developed the concept of resistance as a reaction against the pessimistic determinism of structuralist theories which tend to describe ideology and domination as monolithic and all-powerful. Social theorists like Anthony Giddens and Henry Giroux have argued that determinist theories deny the possibility of social agency and change. For such theorists, the concept of resistance fills the gap between the constraining power of ideology and institutions, and the possibilities for agency and social action.

Giroux describes resistance as a form of activity which appears disruptive, but which should be read politically as a break in the social process. Resistance differs from what he calls accomodaton and opposition, by serving to reveal to a social actor the nature and structure of the social relations in which he or she works. Resistance also involves a degree of self-reflexive awareness on the part of a social agent, and an understanding of the ways in which social reality is connected to material conditions and has been constituted to serve

specific ideological interests. Thus action which seems disruptive to those in positions of power and authority can be understood as a positive movement toward critique and change.

The most useful way to understand resistance in complex social structures that we know of can be developed from Anthony Giddens' theory of "structuration." Giddens argues that the dualism of structure and the individual that was assumed by earlier determinist models, should be understood as the "duality of structure." In the theory of the "duality of structure," structure which had been seen as determining our ideological position and subjectivity does not exist outside of the ongoing struggle of everyday life, but is constantly recreated as what he calls the "structural properties" of social practices. These structural properties are both the medium through which social agents work and these structural properties are produced anew as one outcome of their action. In other words, the actions of social agents can recreate or alter the structural properties which form the conditions for their future actions. Thus, Giddens describes a dialectical relationship between structure and the individual which leaves open the possibility for the social agency and change necessary for resistance.

Like the theory of radical pedagogy, Giddens argues that social actors are not ignorant of the rules and politics of the social practices within which they operate. Social life does not go on "behind their backs." Rather, agents have a practical knowledge of how things work which remains tacit, and a more limited "discursive" knowledge which they can articulate. According to Giddens, social actors monitor their action reflexively, matching their discursive knowledge against the results of their actions. Thus, social actors can achieve the

self-consciousness necessary to resistance by exploring the connections between their discursive and practical knowledge and the relations of social power revealed by the outcome of their actions. In time, this allows them to articulate the shape of the structural properties through which they act, and opens the possibility that they can intervene in the dialectical relationship between themselves as social agents and the structural properties that their actions help recreate. On this model, resistance can be understood as a social agent's attempt to put her expanded discursive knowledge of the structural properties of social practices into action.

This understanding of resistance and Giddens' model of social action, lead us to develop following questions as ways to explore the nature of resistance in our research site.

1. Do these professionals have a discursive awareness of the ideological issues that organize their discourse and institutional politics? That is can they articulate the ideological issues at play in the professional practices in which they engage?

2. Do these workers recognize that the "reality" with which they deal is institutionally constructed and interested, and do they attempt to alter that construction?

3. Do these people recognize that they operate from a subject position constructed by institutional power? If so, do they use this understanding to reposition themselves so that they can speak or write differently, altering what can be said and who can say it?

4. Do these professionals try to change the discursive and social relations within which they work and the professional reality it constitutes? If so, how does their written discourse contribute to these attempts to generate change?

5. To what end do these professionals push for change? That is, to what set of social and political values are they committed?

White Sands Missile Range is a test facility for missiles, electronic warfare devices, engines for space modules, and other operations. It might seem like an unlikely place to investigate cultural politics, but the makeup of the base actually presents itself in some ways as ideal for this type of study. Because White Sands is staffed primarily by civilians, our preliminary work told us there were clear differences between the military ideology and that of the civilian professionals. We chose to investigate the environmental division because we have an innate interest in the environment and in environmental safety and we also suspected that the professional interests and ideology of biology would conflict with that of the military command.

After talking with Captain Stephens, the commanding General's Executive Assistant, Jim Ellis, Civilian Chief of Navy Operations, Glenn Herman, Chief of Programs, and Nancy Dumas, the director of Public Relations to gain access to the base, we were able to speak with T.A. Ladd, the Director of Environmental Safety and to two Wildlife Biologists whose job it is to monitor projects on the base. Most of our early interviews were with the Biologists who gave us serial documents concerning some major issues they've dealt with. Two major issues were particularly fruitful for our research: the listing of the Tularosa pupfish as an endangered species and what is called the Atomic Goat incident. (Brief description) We focused primarily on the work of one biologist, Daisan Taylor, who was not only most insightful and productive but also most interested in the work we were

doing. Our work with Ms. Taylor involved multiple interviews as well as our reading through literally years worth of documentation and correspondence on the pupfish and goat projects.

What I'd like to do in the time we have today is provide some samples from the interviews to address three of the most salient research questions Carl just described.

1) First, we wondered if agents have a discursive awareness of the ideological issues that organize their discourse and institutional politics? That is, can they articulate the ideological issues at play in the discourse in which they engage?

In our interviews with Taylor we noticed that ideological issues of quantification vs. qualification appeared regularly. She recognizes and fights the institution's desire to reduce the interconnected complexity of environmental issues to quantitative results and the myth that objectivity exists and can be measured.

For example, the document review cycle in her job is very complicated, involving multiple pieces of correspondence, and having to shuffle through multiple levels of authority and points of view. In the military's case, all correspondence must be reduced to a single page with bulletted sentences. Capt. Stephens represents the command, the ideological force on base. As the Commanding General's Assistant, he tries to impose the style documented in the Army style manual. He sees this style as an efficient time-saver for officers and executives. According to Stephens, those who have the best "communicative" skills are

those who have the best technical skills -- those who can bullet information. When he sends a document back to be revised, he claims that the writers mistake his request (or command) to change their style as an accusation of personal error. For example, in their annual review, people will often write narratives about their jobs and performance on the personnel review forms. Stephens wants them written like a brief, bulletted quantified measurement. He complains that these people are stubborn because they won't conform to military style, and that they become defensive when they have to revise in that style. Our sense that this refusal is more than mere stubborness is born out in the work we did with the wildlife biologists.

The Environmental division handles complex documents dealing with critical ecological issues. Taylor refuses to accommodate this bulletted style explaining that, "when you can't get a document out of the office or beyond a certain place in the chain, if it's longer than a page or written in complete sentences. . . you lose all ability to explain, to teach, to support your point of view. It feels very conspiratorial, because in a way it relieves these people. . .that a decision has been made. It's their own policy that [leads] them to be poorly informed or misinformed. When we're dealing with natural systems the ramifications are greater. They're more complex, they're harder to see, and they aren't easily quantifiable either."

She resists their asking her to reduce environmental issues

to a quantifiable list; instead, she forces a comparison between her documents and the way the command wants them written. Despite the fact that she knows what the command wants and why, she consciously feeds her lengthy documents through the system, forcing her superiors to deal with her more elaborate, and more accurate, representation.

She also keeps copies of documents and correspondence in her file to build the documentation; this is a strategic way for her to get her information and the stylistic intervention into the case history, and ultimately into the document stream. She is self-consciously acting to change the institutional representation of reality, to fight the reductionist ideology of quantification on both the intellectual and style levels.

I'll show you an example: Customers, or proponents, must fill out a Record of Environmental Consideration form, the most minimal documentation that they have to supply in compliance with the Environmental Policy Act. The intent is to make the proponent aware of their responsibility to the environment when they go in to do tests. It is an old, multiple choice form based on an earlier version of the regulations in the Act. Taylor says that 50% of the time they are xeroxed forms, and the proponent has already circled every #2 for "no effect". Because of the gaps in the form, the loopholes for the proponents, she doesn't accept the form as is. She calls the proponent to get more information, ask more questions about the project, educate them about aspects of their activities that might cause them to

respond in another way besides, "no effect." She claims that the form is "less of a tool for the environmental people who are trying to make sure that laws are obeyed, than it is a tool for the projects to avoid having to do certain things."

There is a qualitative difference that recommendations can't be removed from the context in which they are embedded. But in the kind of culture that says you only do what can be legally regulated, and then only the minimal amount you can get away with, it creates a separation from environmental issues, from a complicated set of relationships in the ecosystem that can't be quantified, therefore defining the environment in a narrow, myopic way.

2) We also wondered if agents recognize that the "reality" with which they deal is institutionally constructed and interested, and do they attempt to alter that construction?

Her position in the area of natural resources is holistic as opposed to the narrow environmental attitudes of the contractors, engineers, and the military environmentalists as well. She says, "to me it's obvious that natural resources is integrated into traditional environmental issues. And you would think these people who have all gone through school the same time I have, they've all experienced the same advancement in environmental concerns, and yet they can sever Natural Resources from other environmental issues and I get no support from within my office."

The Army separates what it calls "natural resources" that is, anything from buildings to the land, to the animals on the

land, from "environment" that is, issues covered by the Environmental Protection Act. Taylor sees this distinction as artificial and counter-intuitive and against her professional training. Furthermore, she describes the genesis of this separation in its bureaucratic structure, in the nature and power of federal regulation.

In the institution's attempt to do as little as possible and to obey a narrow interpretation of the law rather than its spirit, the Army has defined The Environment as only those things that are regulated by the Environmental Protection Act.

Ms. Taylor does not, thus, accept the institutional realities with which she works as natural, but ideologically constructed. Environmental and Natural Resources are not defined by a common goal as one would think, but rather by military ideology and by differing relationships to legal power.

So on to our third area:

3) Do social agents recognize that they operate from a subject position constructed by institutional power?

Taylor describes herself as working her way around two different roles which are imposed on her. In the first role, most of the contractors with whom she works perceive her as a radical environmentalist, in a binary opposition between environmentalists, us vs. them. According to Taylor, the military is "a couple generations behind the world." She says "they haven't figured out that there's a distinction between the radical environmental groups and middle-of-the-roaders, and

themselves. Everyone who isn't on the right is on the left." The military's attitude is that 'we have these people working in our ranks and we're directed to work with them so we're stuck with them'. The attitude of us vs. them frustrates her mission to educate partly because the very people she is trying to inform are suspicious of her intent from the start. This role also limits the kinds of things she can write and to whom.

So her strategy is to monitor her discourse when speaks with project managers and engineers. She does not use emotional language; instead she tries to learn about *their* fields, tries to construct a moderate voice for herself, and creates a persona of scientist, rather than the fanatical lizard-kisser -- her term -- they see her as.

The second position against which she struggles is the military's sense that everyone should be a "loyal team player" and that her job in the military is to "support them in any way possible." The attitude at White Sands is that "we should all be supporting each other in whatever it takes to get the mission done." She, on the other hand, tries to act as a biologist whose role is to see that Range activities honor both the spirit and the letter of the law.

To achieve her ideological goal, she works with individual engineers, learning their field, teaching them to see and understand environmental regulations as she does. She does this largely through a lengthy editing cycle in which she comments on and rewrites engineers' documents, trying to change their

thinking and get them to adopt her vision. She understands the tensions inherent in her position as she works with those who may be ideologically or professionally opposed to her job on the base. She is working neither to accommodate nor to solve situations, but ultimately to change attitudes.

We don't have time to talk about the last two research questions, but you can see the lines that are developing and that we are pursuing. Collectively, we need to look at resistance in a variety of institutions and settings. We haven't, for example, talked about resistance along the lines of gender and ethnicity, which did not seem to be pertinent in this particular case, but may be elsewhere.

We have some tentative questions that may lead us to firmer conclusions. Among them, we are asking:

1. What other examples in the workplace are there of successful as well as unsuccessful patterns of resistance?
2. We also wonder if other studies in less structured settings may reveal occasions of resistance that are more overt and contestatory?
3. And finally, how do we teach students to use language to resist without compromising their professional ethos?